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Nicaraguan, Suing U.S., Tells of Exile Attack

A Nicaraguan health official who said she was attacked and beaten by a group of anti-Sandinists on her country's border with Honduras last year has been brought to the United States to publicize a suit filed by seven Nicaraguans against the Reagan Administration. The suit seeks to challenge American support for such paramilitary groups.

The official, Dr. Myrna K. Cunningham, who works for the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health, and the other plaintiffs are represented by the Center for Constitutional Rights, a New York-based public interest legal organization. Her two-week visit to the United States is sponsored by the center.

The Nicaraguans are seeking damages and an injunction against future raids into Nicaragua. Lawyers from the center filed the suit on behalf of the Nicaraguans in a Federal court in Washington on Nov. 30. Representative Ronald V. Dellums, Democrat of California, and two Florida residents joined the suit, which also seeks a court order closing military training camps operated by Nicaraguan exile groups in Florida.

Reagan Among Those Named

Lawyers from the center say the Nicaraguans have the right to sue under the Alien Tort Claims Act of 1789, which allows foreigners to sue in United States Federal courts for violations of international law.

Among those the complaint names as defendants are President Reagan, William J. Casey, Director of Central Intelligence, former Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr., Secretary of State George P. Shultz, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, and members of Cuban and Nicaraguan exile groups based in Florida.

Officials from the Center for Constitutional Rights went to Nicaragua to obtain testimony from the plaintiffs. Their testimony, according to the center's lawyers, provides evidence that the Reagan Administration has spon-

sored attacks aimed at terrorizing Nicaraguan citizens.

In the complaint, the Nicaraguans tell of rape, kidnapping, torture and murder in attacks on their communities.

Intelligence officials have acknowledged that the Central Intelligence Agency provided financial and military aid to paramilitary forces that have conducted hit-and-run raids in Nicaragua. The officials say the goal of such raids is to stop Nicaragua from providing arms to guerrillas in Salvador.

Dr. Cunningham, who is half-Miskito Indian and who is from the predominantly Miskito region of Zelaya, was interviewed Friday in the center's New York office. She spoke in English, occasionally resorting to Spanish.

Dr. Cunningham said that on Dec. 28, 1981, a jeep taking her and a group of health officials from the village of Bilwaskarma to Huaspan was stopped by about 15 armed men. Some of them, she said, were Miskitos from Bilwaskarma, where she had been working as a regional director of health. Dr. Cunningham said the others were "white." She said that she later recognized them as former members of the national guard of the deposed Government of Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

After beating her, the group took her back to Bilwaskarma, she said, where she and a nurse, Regina Lewis, were assaulted. She said the men also destroyed medical supplies. Dr. Cunningham said she and the nurse were then forced to accompany the men across the Honduran border. After a two-hour walk through the jungle, she said, their

captors took them to a camp where some Miskitos who said they belonged to a group called the "Two Crosses Brigade" said they would kill her.

Asked why the Miskitos whom she knew among the anti-Sandinist bands wanted to threaten her life, Dr. Cunningham said the nature of the training they received with the former national guardsmen made them regard such violence as "normal activity."

Dr. Cunningham said that the Miskitos among her captors had told her that although they did not like the former guardsmen, the leader of the Miskito insurgents, Steadman Fagoth, had said that it was necessary "for the moment" to be allied with them.